

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

January 10, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are at a crossroads in our fight against COVID-19. The new Omicron variant, while causing less severe symptoms in most cases, is highly contagious, and is causing severe strain on hospitals, schools, and businesses in every corner of the United States. Vaccines have proven effective in fighting the virus, particularly in reducing hospitalization rates and deaths, but Omicron is still raging, and causing breakthrough cases among the vaccinated population at a rate much higher than previous variants.

Nearly two years into our nation's battle against this deadly virus, we have learned that one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of the virus is through the use of quality-certified, high-filtration surgical masks and respirators, like N-95s – for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. As such, these higher-quality masks – including those that have been authorized for use in medical settings by the FDA and respirators (N-95s) certified by NIOSH – are a critical tool in our fight against COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, many U.S. based manufacturers answered the call to action and began onshoring manufacturing operations to produce these critical PPE products, and reduce our reliance on foreign made – particularly Chinese-made – products. While there are foreign-made masks that have received FDA authorization or NIOSH certification, there are significant concerns about counterfeiting and quality controls when purchasing such face coverings from abroad. In fact, the CDC estimates that as many as 60% of KN95 masks coming from China are counterfeit. At the same time, there are American manufacturers with hundreds of millions of high-quality masks sitting on their shelves that could slow the spread of the virus and save lives. As long-time champions of promoting American manufacturing and re-shoring critical supply chains from China, this does not sit well with us.

We ask that the administration consider using resources already allocated by Congress for COVID-19-related expenses to purchase and distribute these American-made, quality certified masks, to every American household that requests them. This can be done in conjunction with

the administration's reported plan to mail at-home test kits to American households, and with an only nominal increase in the total cost.

In addition, the administration should engage in an awareness campaign to disabuse American businesses and individuals of the notion that foreign-made PPE is as reliably safe and effective as domestically-made and authorized PPE. It is time for the government to ensure all Americans have easy, regular access to high-quality, American-made masks.

We thank you for your commitment to fighting COVID-19. We strongly encourage the administration to take the opportunity to prevent further loss of life, keep our kids in school, and support American manufacturers and American workers that courageously answered the call to protect our country by leveraging the federal government's substantial authority to prioritize American-made masks and PPE.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Elissa Slotkin".

Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Tim Ryan".

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress